

Art at the cutting edge

The Ends of Collage

Luxembourg & Dayan, London W1S 3PA
10 March – 13 May 2017

Reviewed by Imogen Greenhalgh

A tangle of black ink crawls across the canvas, dark strands unfurling from a pool in the centre. Its tentacles drive apart birds and butterflies and a group of sunbathing women, an earthquake breaching an unsuspecting meadow. Made in the fraught months prior to the outbreak of civil war in Spain in 1936, the work, *Metamorphose*, opens a new survey of collage at London's Luxembourg & Dayan. As its title implies, change is on its way, but there's a savageness to it, anticipating the special insecurity collage breeds. 'What is alive,' observed John Stezaker in an essay on cubist collage included in an accompanying publication, 'is the demolition process.'

The Ends of Collage is presented in three parts, curated by Yuval Etgar in close collaboration with the gallery. There is a pair of concurrent shows in London and New York, then the book of essays, which collates contributions by collage artists such as Stezaker as well as critics. Its premise is to review this thoroughly 20th-century art form, to trace its logic and its legacies, the 'ends' referred to in the title, and our enduring fascination with the tricks it plays.

What unfolds is a series of suggestions about how collage operates: the ways in which it activates images, even those worn blunt through our exposure to them, by slicing and splicing them, sharpening them into focus and distancing them at the same time. Some of the artworks included are not collages in the traditional sense, but share in its project of re-framing and re-contextualising images. For example, a pared back black-and-white 'tracing' by Louise Lawler of one of her own photographs shows a framed work by another artist in the background. It's an image of an image of an image, and, like Miró and his cut-out birds and bathers, Lawler denudes the images she appropriates, stripping them of their former meaning.

Other examples in the exhibition meet our expectations more straightforwardly: for instance, two works by punk feminist artist Linder, which point to the tyranny of the camera

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lens over the female body. Her inclusion in the exhibition is a nod to the importance of collage's subversive techniques to the punk scene, though I might have liked to see this expanded on. More anarchic perhaps than Linder's contribution is a composite by American artist Mark Flood, *The Little Prince*,

Above: *The Little Prince*, Mark Flood, 1984, and right: *Untitled*, John Stezaker, 2015, both at Luxembourg & Dayan



showing Prince Charles with an infant William on his lap. William's face has mutated into something strange and grotesque, and the stiff, regal portrait becomes ridiculous. It prods at the instability of convention and the Establishment. The collagist is, after all, a vandal too.

Over the course of the show, two dominant themes come to the fore, namely collage's treatment of the familiar territories of the home and body, so often the subject of mass-produced imagery. Of these, the works of Max Ernst and John Stezaker are probably the most compelling for the casual visitor, and the artists are presented side by side in the exhibition. It's a satisfying comparison: on Stezaker's first day at The Slade school of art, William Coldstream presented him with a copy of Ernst's *Une semaine de bonté*, pages of which are presented here. The impression the book – a sequence of amalgamations of illustrations from Victorian pulp novels and natural history journals – made on the young Stezaker is clear: the reinvented images are sutured together

with surgical precision, and seem eerily credible, as if Victorians might really have had scaly wings beneath their clothes. Stezaker's cut-and-paste creations are similarly sly, inserting a shadowy cave where a screen siren's face should be.

What both men prove is how disorienting sliced and layered composite images can be, even now in an age where every smartphone user can appropriate and manipulate imagery in a matter of seconds. Collage is not a sophisticated strategy, but when well executed it is far more than merely a nifty trick, and can yield provocative and unexpected results.

After their fizzing chemistry, however, the final room of the exhibition feels harder to access, even with pieces by giants of the medium like André Breton, Kurt Schwitters and Richard Hamilton. What unifies them, if anything? Knowing you're only seeing one segment of the tripartite exhibition perhaps adds to this, particularly as the publication contains all the exhibition's caption information; your perspective, you realise, has limits. It's a frustrating feeling, but in a way operates as a neat homage to the art form in question, presenting connections as well as prising them apart. You drift out of the gallery feeling slightly puzzled, still trying to decipher the collagist's rulebook. Perhaps, with a medium fixated on upsetting our neat understanding of things, that's the way it's meant to be.

Imogen Greenhalgh is assistant editor of *Crafts* magazine

A passion for print

The Woodcut: From Dürer to Now

Pallant House Gallery, Chichester PO19 1TJ
8 March – 25 June 2017

Reviewed by Patrick Myles

As a professional graphic designer, the art of the woodcut is in stark contrast to the state-of-the-art print that I am involved with today. The traditional cutting tools are a far cry from the 27-inch 'high retina' display iMac computer that I use for my work on a daily basis. But visiting an exhibition like this is a reminder not only of the history of the medium, but it also evoked childhood memories of my first experience of print through the linocut (a latter-day variant of the woodcut) and the sensation of carving out a pattern with a tiny chisel into the surface, followed by the 'magical' results from transferring ink on lino to paper.

Bearing in mind the technique, you can only marvel at the sophistication and intricate detail of the earliest and opening print of the display. *Repose on the Flight into Egypt* (c.1504) by Albrecht Dürer is one of a series of woodcuts illustrating the Virgin Mary's life. In true Renaissance style, it has a story-telling narrative coupled with the scientific approach to perspective shown in the



Above: *Suspicious Boy*, Peter Howson, 1994, woodcut on paper, and below: *Travellers Surprised by Sudden Rain*, Utagawa Hiroshige, 1833-4, both at Pallant House Gallery. Right: *Sweet Briar*, Barbara Brown, 1959, at The Whitworth

beautifully detailed architectural forms in the background.

But by the end of the 16th century, the woodcut became less popular in Europe, due to the advent of engravings. However, in Japan the medium continued to develop. The influence of the *mokuhanga* printing technique led to the *ukiyo-e* (loosely translated as 'pictures of a floating world') movement. This is a period of printmaking that has a distinctive aesthetic that I've always admired. So I was delighted to see an original print by Utagawa Hiroshige, the grand master of the genre. *Travellers Surprised by Sudden Rain* (1833-4) is part of his famous series 'The Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido Road'. Hiroshige is most famous for his iconic artwork, *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, but the print in the exhibition is to my mind a great example of his more poetic work achieved through subtleties of light and colour, and a fine quality of line to illustrate the falling rain.

Moving through this small but exquisite exhibition, there are other later examples of European-style prints, such as the geometric architectural forms in Edward Wadsworth's 1949 representation of Lemnos, a village in Greece. However, the Japanese theme remains strong in the work of artist Nana Shiomi. With bold use of colour, she creates simple still-life compositions using iconography from traditional Japanese woodblock printing. There are two examples taken from 'One Hundred Views of Mitate', a series of 100 prints that Shiomi began in 1998. In both *Mirror* (2001) and *Great Buddha* (2011) the artist references the woodcut's traditional function as a means of communicating religious texts.

